

Project History / Methodology

THE Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council IS THE RESULT OF DOZENS OF DAYS of meetings among leading policymakers and practitioners representing a broad spectrum of systems; surveys administered to state and local government officials in communities in 50 states; hundreds of hours of interviews with administrators of innovative programs; and thousands of hours reviewing materials describing research, promising programs, policies, and legislation. This appendix describes the history and the methodology of this project in greater detail.

PROJECT ORIGINS

At its 2001 Meeting, the Executive Committee for the Council of State Governments (CSG) passed a resolution regarding offenders' re-entry into communities. The resolution described the bipartisan concern of state government officials about prisoner re-entry, their desire to inform state policymaking made around this issue, and their interest in federal government initiatives that recognize the uniqueness of each jurisdiction.

The Committee identified this issue as particularly pressing for several reasons. Unprecedented numbers of people are being released from US prisons and jails. Recidivism rates are high, creating a costly cycle of incarceration, release, and return. Corrections budgets have soared to accommodate increasing numbers of inmates at a time when fiscal crises in most

states are forcing cuts in critical services. Newspaper headlines describe tragedies related to the uncoordinated, wholesale release of individuals that might have been prevented with a better allocation of scarce resources.

The resolution established a national Re-Entry Policy Council charged with developing a comprehensive, bipartisan set of recommendations for policymakers to use to improve the likelihood that adults released from prison or jail will avoid crime and become productive, healthy members of families and communities. As a model for engaging key stakeholders and structuring the process of the RPC initiative, CSG drew on its experience as coordinator of the Criminal Justice / Mental Health Consensus Project, an initiative which was then in the middle of an unprecedented two-year effort to prepare specific recommendations to improve

the criminal justice system's response to people with mental illness. That effort resulted in a comprehensive report, released in June 2002, which garnered national media attention and inspired legislative activity on a federal level and in states across the US. The consensus-building structure was echoed in the formation of the Re-Entry Policy Council, and some participants in the Consensus Project became valuable RPC members.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

CSG worked with numerous organizations—many of whom later designated staff to serve on the RPC Steering Committee—to plan the first meeting of the Re-Entry Policy Council. In addition to planning the format and agenda for the meeting, this Planning Committee identified leading constituents in their organizations who could serve on the RPC and serve as ambassadors to their respective associations.

On May 14-15, 2001, CSG convened a cross-section of stakeholders, both Republicans and Democrats, who play key roles in ensuring the successful transition of individuals from prison to the community. This initial, bipartisan meeting consisted of approximately 30 policymakers and practitioners. The group generated preliminary recommendations that became a framework for later deliberations concerning the substance of the Report recommendations.

Following this meeting, in order to best span those systems and to invoke expertise from a range of important, highly relevant viewpoints, CSG established a Steering Committee to the Re-Entry Policy Council, a partnership among representatives from ten organizations:

- American Probation and Parole Association (APPA)
- Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA)
- Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)
- National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO)

- National Association of State Alcohol/Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)
- National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
- National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)
- National Center for State Courts (NCSC)
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
- Urban Institute.

The Steering Committee decided to organize the RPC into three advisory groups: Public Safety and Restorative Activities, Supportive Health and Housing, and Workforce Development and Employment Opportunities. APPA, NAHRO, and NAWB, respectively, coordinated these advisory groups. The vast majority of the participants in the May 2001 planning meeting subsequently served on one or more of these advisory groups and, in one or two cases, a participant from the initial meeting made a presentation to advisory group members. In the end, only a few of the participants from the original group, owing to retirement from public service or other issues, did not serve as active participants in the advisory groups to the Re-Entry Policy Council.

In forming the advisory groups, members of the Steering Committee identified practitioners and policymakers widely respected by their counterparts across the country, ensuring an impressive level of expertise across the project. Advisory group members included legislators, law enforcement officials, judges, corrections officials, community corrections administrators, probation and parole officials, public housing administrators, state health officials, workforce investment board members, service providers, researchers, people with criminal records, crime victims, prosecutors, and other stakeholders and experts. Many of the advisory group members served in leadership positions in their respective associations, such as the American Jail Association and the National District Attorneys Association.

Collectively, members of the advisory groups represented a wide array of local and state jurisdictions, both rural and urban, across the country. They hailed from government organizations, as well as nonprofit groups and the private sector.

ROLE OF ADVISORY GROUPS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Over the course of the next three years, the advisory groups met separately and collectively on several occasions. For each round of meetings, the three advisory groups adhered to a similar agenda, format, and set of goals. At the first round of meetings, in May-June 2002, each advisory group reviewed draft policy statements generated by the initial cross-section of policymakers that CSG and the Planning Committee had convened. During these meetings, the advisory groups revised and expanded upon the initial draft of policy statements and agreed upon a methodology to identify programs, policies, and legislation to inform further discussion at the next round of meetings.

At the second round of meetings, in December 2002–January 2003, each advisory group reviewed draft reports that incorporated comments received during the first round of meetings as well as program and policy examples identified by staff on the Steering Committee.

For the third and final round of meetings, the advisory groups met together in November 2003. At this conference, advisory groups reviewed and commented on the latest iteration of the draft document, which by then included policy statements, recommendations for the implementation of the policy statements, and examples that illustrated how some jurisdictions and programs had addressed a particular aspect of re-entry. Advisory group members also had an opportunity to exchange comments on the work of the other advisory groups and to hear from key officials representing the US Depart-

ments of Justice, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

In December 2003 and February 2004, CSG, together with NAHRO and APPA, convened two focus groups meetings: one on issues concerning children and families, and another to address the role of victims in prisoner re-entry. Although both of these constituencies had been represented on the advisory groups, these topics required stand-alone meetings to ensure they were addressed comprehensively in the policy statements.

The Re-Entry Policy Council issued a preview to its Report in July 2004. Foreshadowing and promoting the complete project to be released a few months later, the preview explained the organization of the complete document and briefly highlighted its findings.

REPORT PREPARATION

Steering Committee members served as the primary authors of the policy statements (and the text under those policy statements) corresponding to their area of expertise. RPC members with extensive expertise in areas such as victim services, legal barriers to re-entry, family issues, and physical health care contributed additional text.

CSG staff served as editors of the overall document. Although CSG staff were the lead writers of the policy statements in Part I (Planning a Re-Entry Initiative), all parts of the *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council* reflect an extensive, collaborative effort among the members of the Steering Committee and the members of the advisory boards.

The project partners developed and maintained a common vision for the Report by communicating regularly—often speaking by telephone or emailing each other several times a day. In addition, over the three-year lifespan of the project, the Steering Committee met for half- or full-day discussions on a half dozen occasions.